

## Article

# Deep Culture and the Mystical Agency of Mary in Eastern Christianity

Ali Qadir <sup>1,\*</sup>  and Tatiana Tiaynen-Qadir <sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup> New Social Research, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tampere, 33014 Tampere, Finland<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tampere, 33014 Tampere, Finland; tatiana.tiaynen@live.fi

\* Correspondence: ali.qadir@uta.fi

Received: 2 November 2018; Accepted: 21 November 2018; Published: 23 November 2018



**Abstract:** The Virgin Mother Mary has always been venerated in Eastern Christianity far beyond her scriptural role. In this paper, we propose a symbolic framework of deep culture and apply it to understanding the prominence of Mary and the manner in which she plays a role in people's lives through a bewildering variety of Marian icons. The framework begins with a mystical/esoteric perspective to appreciate Mary as a symbol that is multivalent, irreplaceable, archetypal, interior, and manifest yet hidden. We analyze images and stories of five highly venerated icons in Greece, Russia, Finland, and amongst diasporic Orthodox Churches, as well as associated hymns. Our analysis reveals that Mary's significance for Orthodox faithful is best understood in her role as symbolic doorway to mystical religiosity. This role is highly agentic, although not in the sense in which agency is typically—exoterically—understood as analytical and external, but rather as esoterically affective and internally transformative. We show how a deep culture framework adds to our knowledge of Mary in Orthodox Christianity and how it can be used to examine similar figures in other contemporary and historical religious traditions.

**Keywords:** Eastern Christianity; Mary; Mother of God; deep culture; archetype; symbolic; agency; mystical; icons

## 1. Introduction

In Eastern Christianity, Mary has long held a place of prominence ([Honkasalo 2015](#); [Keinänen 2010](#); [Kupari 2016](#); [Seppälä 2010](#); [Tiaynen-Qadir 2016](#); [Vuola 2010](#)). Amongst Orthodox Christians, Mary is commonly referred to as Theotokos (Greek) or Bogoroditsa (Russian), often translated as Mother of God in English. No service or prayer is without references to her, not to mention countless hymns produced and sung daily in Orthodox churches around the world ([Schmemmann 1991](#)). Most of the icons venerated and used in worship by Eastern Christians depict Mary. Mariological iconography is immensely rich, with over 700 different depictions in Russia alone, including over 300 icons that have come to be known as “wonder-working.” The overwhelming bulk of icons venerated and incorporated into home life and worship around the world depict Mary as the central, dominating figure holding a small (typically, young) figure of Jesus.

How should we understand this widespread Marian devotion and the bewildering variety of Marian icons in Eastern Christianity? For some, Mary is an empowering resource in their daily lives (e.g., [Keinänen 2010](#); [Tiaynen-Qadir 2016](#)). For others, following 14th century CE theologian [Palamas Palamas \(1993\)](#), Mary is a call to inward depth and a model of “hesychia” [silent prayer] for “silencing the mind . . . [accessing] things below forgotten . . . laying aside conceptual images” ([Hierotheos 1994](#), p. 317). Such perspectives shed light on the roles Mary may play in Orthodox practice, but do not really suggest how these roles affect people, or the ways in which such roles and many others coalesce into the devotion of one figure. What soon becomes evident is that performativity

of Marian devotion—the emphasis on impressive icons, melodious hymns, emotionally articulated depth of affection, logically laid out scriptural importance, etc.—is central to understanding how and in what way the Virgin Mother plays a role in people’s lives through such variety.

Attention to the poetics of Marian devotion cuts across divisions between clerical/official and lay/folk religion, as well as between cognition and materiality. By attending to devotion of Mary, here we are not so concerned with theological disputes about the scriptural role of Mary or with how such theological accounts may vary from the ways in which people adopt her in their worship and daily lives. Rather, we look inward to what is often termed a mystical or esoteric dimension to religious praxis, as opposed to a surface or exoteric dimension, to seek an understanding of how Mary works in the lives of people.<sup>1</sup> Literal or scriptural discussions are an important and necessary aspect, but mystical appreciation of Mary takes her as a symbol that only starts at the surface and proceeds ever-deeper. Clergy and laity alike might be open to esoteric Mary.

In some ways, the distinction between exoteric and esoteric corresponds to “thinking” and “feeling” Jungian personality types. Although anachronistically labeled, these two categories have come to denote more than just “thought” vs. “emotion,” speaking to distinct ways of approaching reality. Recent research on religious phenomena reveals how these two personality types show remarkable differences, for example in approaching Biblical hermeneutics (Francis et al. 2018), or handling recovery from mental illnesses (Unterrainer et al. 2014), or during visits to religious sites (Francis et al. 2015). In our case, we believe these types may not be mutually exclusive but, rather, capture two styles of being religious (although some religious traditions and some people may be more prone to one style than others and so may encourage varying degrees of mystical appreciation). “Feeling” is broadly where we associate the mystical/esoteric dimension of Marian devotion. This does not take away from the “thinking,” exoteric side but, rather, draws attention to affect *in addition to* thought.

We approach the mystical role of Mary in the lives of Orthodox faithful through the theoretical framework of deep culture (Qadir and Tiaynen-Qadir 2016), which sees religious praxis generally as poetic phenomena that point to some deeper sense of meaning and significance. The framework of deep culture appreciates the ever-present mystical or esoteric dimension to evident religious worship and everyday praxis, enabling analysts to ask how the visible is connected in a dimension of depth to the mystical. Building on post-Jungian archetypal theory of symbols (Corbin 1964; Hillman 1983; Jung 1968), the framework articulates five aspects of the intimate connection between surface and depth. Depth is, of course, the dimension that has long connoted sense-making and the psyche, at least since the time of Heraclitus (Hillman 1975, pp. xvii, 88), and is not an either/or binary but, rather, a scale of significance extending “downward” into the human being.

We use the framework of deep culture to explore the diversity of qualities in visual and verbalized images of the Mother of God, analyzing five popular icons, related traditions, and three associated akathists (devotional hymns) in Eastern Orthodox Christianity.<sup>2</sup> As we discuss later, icons are believed to be windows to a sacred, opaque world (Munteanu 2013; Tradigo 2006), and are hence well suited to unpacking the depth dimension of Eastern Christian worship. Marian icons, in particular, are very common and highly venerated, far exceeding Mary’s limited scriptural role. We bring to bear our long-term, multi-sited ethnographic work in parishes across the heartlands of Eastern Christianity (Russia, Finland, and Greece) and in diasporic settings (Canada, Sweden, and South Africa), all of which has shown the centrality of Marian devotion through icons. In this article, in order to highlight

<sup>1</sup> Here and throughout we use “mystical” in the dictionary and commonly accepted religious-studies sense of an adjective meaning esoteric, relating to a spiritual significance transcending human understanding, and inspiring a sense of spiritual mystery (Oxford English Dictionary).

<sup>2</sup> Akathists are devotional hymns dedicated to an iconic depiction and were typically written at about the same time as the icon. Traditionally, authorship is not ascribed, and minor variations occasionally accrue in the words. They are used in contemporary vernacular practice in church services and at homes. We refer to the dates of access where URLs are available. English translations of akathists from Church Slavonic are ours.

the mystical appeal of Mary, we bring out the popular stories and theologies around five icons and also analyze three associated hymns to Mary. While we could adduce much more data, we believe this set illustrates the variations in our analysis.

When approached from the perspective of deep culture, Marian icon devotion in Eastern Christianity unveils a very notable finding: Mary appears to have agency, of a sort, through her icons. This finding supports similar research on beliefs of Orthodox Christians about Marian icons initiating actions and participating in their surroundings beyond clerical control (Weaver 2011, p. 397). Indeed, it now appears that the concept of agency in religious studies has been somewhat untenably restricted to intentional actors, with scholars more confident about talking of the agency of objects since the material turn (Morgan et al. 2015). Furthermore, religious agency has long been theorized as a “secular,” neutral category aimed at non-religious ends in a religious domain. However, recent, critical scholarship has shown that agency as a category is both denominationally biased (Protestant) and gendered (patriarchal) as it is viewed in penetrative, literal, and singular senses (Ahmed 2010; Avishai 2008; Bracke 2008; Mahmood 2006). Our findings add to such critical scholarship by further challenging received notions of agency and adding to alternative conceptions. We show that Marian agency through icons is internally enabling and affective, and that it furthers religious ends within religious praxis. We also find that Marian agency is inherently multiple, and that the Virgin Mother has different faces in different depictions to perform somewhat different roles.

In this way, we show that what seems to be a suppression of Mary or the notion that she embodies a stereotypical gender role in some traditions, is in fact due to the use of inappropriately defined categories such as “agency.” Once we link the literal/exoteric to the symbolic/mystical dimension through deep culture, we can appreciate the role of Mary and thereby see the agency of the Virgin Mother in the particular ways she plays her roles in the lives of Eastern Christians.

The paper is organized as follows. In the next section, we introduce the theoretical framework of deep culture to link exoteric/literal aspects of religious praxis to an esoteric/mystical dimension. We emphasize the importance of a mystical approach to Mary, according to which she should be perceived as a symbol, and then open up what that means. In the following section, we present our results about the many agencies of Mary, first introducing Marian icons and outlining our data. Then, in five subsections, one devoted to each icon, we describe the affective, enabling, and multiple agency of Mary. These subsections illustrate the agentic themes of birthing, acting quickly, quenching, nourishing, and taming. Finally, we discuss what this agency means for thinking about the poetics of Mary, and how a similar approach can be used in further empirical analyses and theoretical developments.

## 2. Symbols, Archetypes, and the Feminine

We draw on a tradition of phenomenology that is particularly relevant to mystical religious life: research following the work of Carl Jung, once star student and later rival of Freud. The famous break between the two foundational figures of depth psychology occurred in large part over the significance of religion (Palmer 2013). Key to Jung’s theory of religion is that we must change our (now-natural) scientized, literal assumptions to appreciate its role in human life (Ahmed 2002). Jung argues that (a) religion is fundamentally symbolic, (b) much of this symbolism is shared by humanity in a collective aspect to the unconscious, and (c) what are symbolized are archetypal images (psychic equivalents of instincts). This psychological view of religion was extended by, among others, Hillman Hillman (1975), Neumann Neumann (1955), Von Franz Von Franz (1997), and Corbin Corbin (1964).<sup>3</sup> Such post-Jungians argue for a “poetic basis of mind and a psychology that starts

---

<sup>3</sup> Of course, there have been numerous other extensions to Jung’s work, such as in recent advances in analytical psychology, neuropsychology, personality assessments, and in self-help literature. However, these apply Jung’s principles in a different direction and do not directly extend the notion of the collective unconscious from an anthropological or sociological perspective, as does the line of scholarship we summarize here.

neither in the physiology of the brain, the structure of language, the organization of society, nor the analysis of behavior, but in the process of imagination" (Hillman 1975, p. xi).

## 2.1. Symbols

The imagination has been a central feature in phenomenology from Kant on (Warnock 1976), and scholarly consensus ascribes it two faculties: that of creating or producing, and that of perceiving or reproducing. Both faculties are crucial for post-Jungians, but the latter especially so. That is, what we see depends on how we see it, and the way we see is primarily symbolic. The "poetic basis of the mind" means that people perceive or grasp reality through images or, more properly, through symbols. People must perceive reality in the language of symbols and the imagination uses these symbols to construct meaning.

Now for most literary theorists, symbols are defined by their multivalence (e.g., Damrosch 1981). What distinguishes a symbol from a sign is precisely that the latter only stands analogically for one other thing (one type of stick figure on a toilet door for a man, another for a woman, etc.) but a symbol can signify many things. A sign is there merely to "remind the viewer of a concept" (Spretnak 2004, p. 222) but a symbol points in many directions. This is not simply a complication but rather necessary to make multivalent references. Corbin (Corbin 1997, p. 14) put it this way: "The symbol . . . is the only means of saying something that cannot be apprehended in any other way; a symbol is never 'explained' once and for all, but must be deciphered over and over again." Phenomenologists (like Gadamer, Ricoeur, or Tillich) also note that a symbol points *beyond* itself while containing meaning *within* itself.

One important implication of this is that a symbol is an inexhaustible source for interpretation. It does not signify a particular signified, but rather the signified is never reached: it is an element in an endless process of signification (Damrosch 1981, p. 67). Of course, this process of signification moves between conceptualization and image. A symbol must be interpreted in language although such interpretation is always incomplete and inadequate, leading to further interpretation and so on (Sperber 1975). So, a myth—as a loose narrative organized in symbols—is always accompanied by a mythology, a societal vessel in which the myths are allowed to make inner sense. Of course, this is just a specification of the broader anthropological notion of culture as patterns that provide the basis for making sense of the world. This is also what Jung was getting at with his concept of a "collective unconscious" that provides a common template for people to process reality symbolically.

Another implication of the symbol's contiguity with what it signifies is that a symbol could not be expressed in any other way. A sign may be replaced for reasons of expediency or by cultural consensus (this stick figure rather than that stick figure on the door) and this would cost nothing to the signification: people would just read the new sign in the same way. But a symbol participates in the reality it signifies. It cannot be replaced without irreparably damaging the signification, or the "mystery" it points to. For instance, the sun symbolizes light, revelation, energy, etc., and it is difficult to imagine that cultural consensus will now assign that role to Venus (Damrosch 1981). Whether a symbol is seen as being too deeply embedded in cultural consciousness to replace, or whether it is "hardwired" into the cultural unconscious, either way it cannot be readily exchanged: the mysteries it points to are only accessible through that symbol.

A third implication of symbolic connection to its signified is that no symbol should be taken purely literally. Singular, literal interpretation of any symbol is an insistence on one-sidedness of signification in the face of humanity's inherent plurality. Hillman (Hillman 1975, p. 174) puts it as a rule: "Remember: the enemy is the literal, and the literal is not the concrete flesh but negligence of the vision that concrete flesh is a magnificent citadel of metaphors." It is not that any symbol, like the sun or the chalice, is not a literal object. Of course it is that as well, but the literal reading is also an entry into symbolic perception, for instance of the revelatory sun in Blake's poetry (Damrosch 1981) or of the enfolding chalice in feminist theology (Eisler 1987). The key is not just that anything *can be* a symbol,



but that everything *is* a symbol; or rather, every thing, event, or person can be read symbolically in addition to its literal facticity. Not doing so is a literalist mistake.

The emphasis on symbols distinguishes Jung and post-Jungians from Freud and those following him. While the latter seek significance in the “language” of the unconscious, the former seek it in primordial images that cannot be reduced to concepts, “because the image is the primary psychological datum” (Hillman 1983, p. 9). The imaginal is, crucially, “personified,” leading to the notion of “archetype” as an essential building block for Jung, Hillman, and others. The complexity of archetypes and their fundamental challenge to our naturalized, Cartesian way of conceptualizing things defy direct capture. Like “art,” “society,” “wellbeing,” etc., archetypes cannot be completely circumscribed or defined yet they are still used. Hillman (Hillman 1975, p. xiii) discusses the term “archetypes” by elaborating the ways in which archetypes work rather than what they are:

Let us then imagine archetypes as the *deepest patterns of psychic functioning*, the roots of the soul governing the perspectives we have of ourselves and the world. They are axiomatic, self-evident images to which psychic life and our theories about it ever return. They are similar to other axiomatic first principles, the models or paradigms, that we find in other fields.

For Hillman, as for Jung, archetypes are autonomous to the extent that individuals do not fantasize or imagine them. We are, rather, living them, or experiencing the world through them like instincts, similar to Kantian categories of perception like space.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, “All the most powerful ideas in history go back to archetypes” (Jung, Collected Works, Volume 8).

This is not so radical a proposition as it may first seem. Since the constructionist turn in social theory, it has become a truism to state that how people perceive reality depends on their vantage point. Most social constructionism tends to reduce that vantage point to more “real” sociological factors such as gender, class, or ethnicity. However, post-Jungians stress the importance of psychological factors that shape how people perceive reality. Just as gender, class, or ethnicity do not exist in the sense that we can touch them but nor are they simply fantasized, so archetypes do not “exist” like tables and chairs but nor are they manufactured by humans. Archetypes, in this view, are received more than produced, descending from what Corbin (1964) calls the “imaginal” rather than being abstracted up from human “imagination” (c.f. Qadir 2018). Crucial to this perspective is that archetypal symbols are ubiquitous: they are present all around us in nature and contemporary practice yet are typically perceived only in their literal re-presentation.

To sum up, complex symbols such as those often found in religious practice are (1) *multivalent*, (2) *irreplaceable*, (3) *archetypal* to the extent that they carry significance across cultures and times, and (4) pointing to interiority as *principles of perception*. Moreover, (5) they are *manifest* in popular culture yet simultaneously hidden so that their significance emerges only with appropriate conceptual lenses (or societal vessels) which carries signification beyond the literal object itself. Symbols need not be written or even pictured in art, but can be (Hillman would say, typically are) personified, yet they are forceful only in as much as they are metaphors and not allegorical signifiers. Taken together, these propositions constitute a framework for understanding cultural representations termed “deep culture” (Qadir and Tiainen-Qadir 2016).

## 2.2. The Symbolic Feminine

In his masterful study, “The Great Mother,” Erich Neumann explores the structure, dynamics, and polyvalence of the archetypal Feminine as a symbol that manifests both in society and the

<sup>4</sup> In one of his last works, Jung (Jung 1968, p. 58) wrote: “What we properly call instincts are physiological urges, and are perceived by the senses. But at the same time, they also manifest themselves in fantasies and often reveal their presence only by symbolic images. These manifestations are what I call archetypes.”

individual (women *and* men). He argues for understanding the archetypal Feminine as a “psychic reality [that] evades our desire for schematic disposition” (Neumann 1955, p. 83), and, therefore, poetic in its nature. For Neumann, the feminine archetype appears as a motif in ancient Egyptian theology, Hellenistic mysteries of Mithras, Middle Ages Christian symbolism, as well as visions and dreams of a modern psychotic.

Psychic processes (and especially the realm of unconscious) are symbolic, so are always surprising, multidirectional, and multifarious, and the archetypal Feminine is all the more so. Its nature is paradoxical: the Good Mother archetypal figure is on the same axis as the Terrible Mother. Moreover, there is an intrinsic dynamic along this axis. For instance, nourishing and sheltering qualities may turn into deadly suffocating embrace in the blink of an eye and within a single individual. Ancient goddesses would often encompass polar qualities, giving life and devouring at the same time. Another example of the dynamic archetypal feminine is along another axis with inspiration mysteries (wisdom Sophia) on one pole, and mysteries of drunkenness (Circe, etc.) on the other. The archetypal feminine by nature encompasses distinct, even opposing, poles and so is easily labelled “paradoxical” or “contradictory” by logical reasoning.

Returning to the contemporary world, the archetypal feminine has been to a large extent suppressed and devalued in modernity (Ahmed 2002; Baring and Cashford 1991; Bray 2016). The dominant view of the person is of a singular ego controlling irrational impulses. Long and pervasive periods of patriarchy conflated the rational ego with the masculine and irrational impulses with the feminine (Irigaray 1985). Moreover, the literalism of modernity readily conflated the masculine with man and the feminine with woman. This was not always so: ambiguous Greek figures of Hermes, Dionysus, Artemis, and a Hercules who completes his feats then serves a Queen—not to mention Set and Horus in Egypt and Ardhanarishvara in Hinduism—bear witness to more complex formations of gender representations. So, rather than see Freud as “discovering” a scientific truth that all little girls are actually little boys who suffer penis envy, we should see Freud as the culmination of a long tradition of pathologizing the feminine within both women and men. Men become associated with ego, rationality, and penetrating agency that acts upon passive, irrational women. This literalizing view has had tremendous social implications but has also obscured the symbolic dimension of religious experiences in which images symbolize multiple significances and complex gender.

For Neumann, and for most post-Jungians, men have feminine aspects just as women have masculine aspects (Andrews 2016). These are psychological-symbolic concepts in which “masculinity” may represent a certain type of reason: penetrative, analytic, and external. By contrast, “feminine” represents a different sort of attitude: receptive, poetic, and inner-oriented (Ahmed 2002, p. 83). Some post-Jungian scholars emphasize that femininity and masculinity thus depict certain qualities and their interplay within the self, irrespective of social and biological gender. One of the important functions of the archetypal feminine for the psyche is its transformative potential (Bray 2016, p. 19; Neumann 1955, p. 74).

This conception of the symbolic feminine connects with a stream in “apophatic” Orthodox theology. Here, the Trinitarian God is in the realm of uncreated energies (in contrast to the created human realm) and is inexpressible and incomprehensible in human terms (Lossky 1976; Seppälä 2013). Therefore, all human terms that are applied to describe aspects of this realm are necessarily metaphorical in their nature and must not be taken literally (Seppälä 2013, p. 15). In other words, although the terms used to describe God may be the same as those used to describe human reality, these terms are used very differently and mean different things. Crucially, “feminine” (*Mother of God*) and “masculine” (*God the Father*) are not only literal but also metaphorical, and each has distinct inner functions. Mary’s role here was foreshadowed by Jung (2011, p. 100), who wrote, “One could have known for a long time that there was a deep longing in the masses for an intercessor and mediatrix who would at last take her place alongside the Holy Trinity and be received as ‘the Queen of heaven and Bride at the heavenly court’.” However, this statement was not really followed up, and there has been only scattered attention to understanding Mary archetypally.

### 3. The Many Agencies of Mary

We now turn to Mary as archetypally feminine to understand her symbolic and mystical role by examining Marian images in icons. Icons—two-dimensional depictions of Christ, Mary, saints, angels, and biblical events painted on a wooden board—have long been central to Orthopraxis as “windows on eternity” (Munteanu 2013). Writing an icon traditionally requires a great deal of spiritual preparation on the part of the iconographer, whose task is to create a divinely blessed image that is able to communicate the invisible beauty of the divine realm through the holy grace and nature of the depicted person. Although classified by some as “religious art,” one very important difference is that a competent artist works hard to insert themselves into their painting, to make a naturally occurring scene “their own,” but an iconographer works just as hard to eliminate themselves from in between the viewer and the subject of the icon.

Mary is the subject of a very large number of icons. Although Eastern Orthodoxy is well-known for its icon depictions of the Virgin Mother of God, it is less well-known that there are thousands of different iconic depictions, each with its own style and story. In some, the Theotokos stands alone, in a tremendous variety of poses and settings. In others, she appears with Jesus, where she is typically depicted as the dominant figure, often centrally placed and very large compared to Jesus. Jesus is either a child or child-sized figure with adult features. Their poses vary widely, from tender touches and glances to regal postures with both sets of eyes gazing upon the viewer. The sheer variety of icons is bewildering. In fact, Mary has a rather limited role in scripture, and there are only four occasions where her few words are recorded in the Bible (in Luke and in John). On other occasions, she is mentioned only in passing, and early Church records also show little evidence of a cult of Mary that grew after the Council of Ephesus declared her “Theotokos” (Carroll 1986, pp. 4–5). Yet, by now she has by far the greatest number of icons devoted to her, “written” in a number of stylistic traditions (Cawthorne 2005). Even a cursory glance at Orthodox icons quickly reveals that Marian iconography far exceeds the Theotokos’ scriptural role in quantity, form, variety, and veneration amongst laity and clergy. Most icons have some story of revelation attached to them, characteristically involving Mary revealing herself to a saint, iconographer, or a lay person.

Such “action” by Marian icons is not uncommon. According to anthropologist Weaver, icons are also agents, discursively similar to the divine figures they depict and as such act with the same authority, surpassing clerical authorities (Weaver 2011, p. 397). Historically, many Marian icons have been legitimized by the Church years after they became popular and were venerated by Orthodox faithful for being miraculous or “wonder-working.” Of course, venerating an icon is not venerating the material pictures but is directed rather to the figure in the painted icon and through them to the sacred realm (Hann and Goltz 2010, p. 12). In Marian icons, it is not the image that is venerated but “She Herself contemplated through mediation, with the help of icon-writing art” (Florensky 1994, p. 48). The highest form of icon painting, according to Pavel Florensky, is when icons convey “all-human canons” which are naturally received and recognized as something very familiar, longed for by “all human consciousness” (Florensky 1994, p. 69). Such canons, therefore, are reminiscent of different archetypes that many Marian icons embody.

Naturally, we pick only a limited selection of Marian icons here to highlight the utility of our frame. Our attention is on five such icons and three associated akathists (devotional hymns) to them. These Marian hymns might be recited in the church or at home by faithful. We include popular traditions around these icons not to validate them, but rather to illustrate how these stories are alive in people’s engagement with the Mother of God. While akathists can be seen as part of “church poetry” (Florensky 2002, p. 109), these stories, their different versions and personal stories of miraculous help remind more of living “folk poetry”, surrounding Mary. The study is part of our long-term anthropology of religion, but space prevents discussion of our ethnographic findings. We have identified five icons that emerged as significant in our ethnographic fieldwork of two major heartlands of Eastern Orthodoxy: Greece and Russia. These icons evoke different aspects of the Mother of God that must be taken symbolically as revealing inner “psychic processes,” which we now turn to.

### 3.1. Containing and Birthing

The icon of the Virgin *Panaghia Tsambika* is probably the most venerated icon of Mary in Greek Rhodes, and is known to many Orthodox worldwide. *Tsambika* derives from *tsamba*, “a flicker of light,” a reference to the manner in which the icon was found on the peak of the mountain centuries ago, and where a small church was later built. According to tradition, this icon has worked many miracles, most to do with barren women who beseech the Mother of God to grant them a child. The best-known story is about the wife of a Turkish, Muslim Pasha (when Greece was part of the Ottoman Empire), who could not conceive a child. She prayed to the icon and swallowed a small wick which she had previously burnt in the icon’s vigil light. She conceived but the Pasha would not believe that the child was his, nor that a miracle had taken place. However, at birth the child was found clutching the wick of the virgin light in its tiny palm. In gratitude, the Pasha then donated all the lands that surround the church now ([Kogeraki n.d.](#)). Even today, the vernacular use of the icon is mainly by women who can’t conceive and who pray for divine intervention. Visitors climb up hundreds of stairs to get to the “Upper” church, a metaphorical connection with Mary who is referred to as “holy ladder” ([Kogeraki n.d.](#), p. 24).

The original *Tsambika* is a silver-plated icon that depicts Mary in the *orans* (praying) posture with her extended hands, and Christ as a child in the similar *orans* position in her chest and belly (Figure 1). This ancient style of iconography is often called the *Platytera* (Πλατυτέρα), which can be translated as “wider” or “more spacious,” indicating Mary as the carrier of the Creator of the universe. There are a multitude of other Marian icons which are painted in this style. In Church Slavonic, this type of icon is referred to as the Virgin of the Sign (*Znamenie*, Знамение). This style metaphorically depicts Jesus in the womb of the Virgin, pointing to the mystery of incarnation in which Mary as holy vessel contains the uncontainable. However, in the *Tsambika* icon, Mary’s hands do not only extend in prayer, but are also fashioned in the manner of embrace. She embraces the un-embraceable God, the child Jesus, and so entire humanity. The embrace is so obvious that the parish of Taxiarches and *Panaghia Tsambika* of the Metropolis of Rhodes metaphorically “welcomes [visitors] in the arms of *Panaghia* (Παναγία, All-Holy)” ([Kogeraki n.d.](#), p. 10).

The *Tsambika* monastery receives thousands of visitors from all around Greece and Eastern European heartlands of Orthodoxy, but also from diasporic and minority contexts (such as France, Belgium, and Finland). A guest prayer book in the “Upper” church is full of hand-written prayers, words of gratitude and devotional hymns, expressed in different forms and languages by various people. Numerous wax dolls are placed under the icon in hopes of divine intervention, as are photos of children as testimony to and gratitude for Mary’s intervention. Many local women name their children after *Tsambika* in gratitude to the Virgin for her divine assistance in conceiving a child. The *Tsambika* Mother of God is approached by women as a woman who understands and embraces a mother’s pain and joy, but also as the Mother of God who divinely enables motherly experiences. In this sense, the archetypal nature of the *Tsambika* icon is in its vessel character of the feminine that shelters the unborn as well as protects the born ([Neumann 1955](#), p. 45). Such functions of containing and sheltering overlap with, and are represented by, archetypal images such as nest, cradle, bed, ship, hut, house, cave, temple, mountain, lattice, wall, veil ([Neumann 1955](#), p. 46). Many of these images are found in other Marian icons, for instance in the “Intersession of the Theotokos” (as the protecting veil) or in the “Unbreakable Wall.”





**Figure 1.** Panaghia Tsambika (copy), Rhodes, Greece (photo by authors).

The archetypal significance of containing, sheltering, and protecting goes beyond experiences of embodied birthing or mothering. Some Orthodox theologians see Mary as “the archetype of mankind” (Schmemmann 1991). Although Schmemmann uses the term archetype differently (and less rigorously) than we do here, his use of the definite article is important: Mary is *the* archetypal representation of all humankind. The mystery of containing God and giving birth to God within the self is equally important for men and women. As one priest put it while preaching in a church service during our fieldwork: “Mary is an example for us, an example to give birth to love and small, good deeds . . . bearded or not, tall or short, a man or a woman, with a belly or not, we all can give birth to love”. In this vein, men too are esoterically and metaphorically inspired to be “pregnant” with and give birth to God.

According to Gregory Palamas, the Virgin was the only human who—due to her qualities and purity—was able to contain the immortal spirit that exceeds human realms and hence give birth to eternal God (Palamas 1993, p. 88). The famous kontakion (a form of hymn) of the Nativity, divinely inspired and composed by Romanos the Melodist in 6<sup>th</sup> century CE Byzantine and now sung during Christmas, poetically glorifies how “the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One [“the One who is prior to substance” in Ancient Greek or Church Slavonic], “The Unapproachable One”, “the eternal



God". This is why in Orthodox Christianity, Mary is mostly referred to as the Bearer of God (Theotokos, Θεοτόκος in Greek), The Birth-giver of God (Bogoroditse, Богородице in Church Slavonic) or the Mother of God (Bozhja Mater', Божья Матерь in Church Slavonic).

The Tsambika icon (similar to other Platytera, or Sign, Marian icons) symbolizes the holy vessel that embodies the mystery of containing and birthing. Of course, the literal side to it is assistance in actual conceiving or birthing. But the agency of Mary here is also in the act of containing the eternal God and in the act of birthing God, the agency that inspires inner spiritual transformation of others. This is obvious to some faithful who have visited or pray to the icon, as we discovered in our ethnography. In daily morning prayers, there are poetic references to the Mother of God as the one who contains the eternal God and enables related spiritual experiences among people: "O marvellous chamber of the King, create me as the house of the Divine Spirit . . . O thou who art above the angels, create me above the worldly mold" (Molitoslov 2008).

### 3.2. Acting Quickly

Another type of archetypal significance can be found in the Marian icon "She Who is Quick to Hear" (Γοργοεπήκοο in Greek, Скоропослушнице in Church Slavonic), whose story originates in the 17th century Docheiariou Monastery on Mount Athos. This icon is an ancient wall-painted depiction of Mary of the type Odigitria, "She who shows the way", in which the Virgin points to the Child Christ, who is the Way (Tradigo 2006, p. 166). The icon was located near the entrance to the monastery's dining room, so the 17th century trapezares (cook) monk Neilos used to pass it regularly with a lit torch. According to tradition, one day he heard a voice telling him not to pass here with a torch, "leaving smoke on my icon." Still, he continued. A few days later, again he heard: "Unmonastic monastic how long will you dishonorably smoke up my image?" Neilos was immediately struck blind. Only then did he realize that the voice he heard was of Mary, and that he was punished for his arrogance. He prayed and begged for forgiveness, and soon regained his sight. That very moment, the holy Theotokos revealed her name as "She Who is Quick to Hear" for she will speedily hear those who call upon her name.

The circulation of the story of Neilos indicates how this icon is now used by Orthodox faithful. It became one of the most venerated not only in the monastery, but its fame spread in the rest of Orthodox Greece, Russia, Finland, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, and other places (Figure 2). It is also venerated in diasporic Orthodox churches now. In all these places, it is the icon that some turn to first when in urgent need or in distress. For many women, "She Who is Quick to Hear" is the one who understands a mother's pain, worries, and joy, but also as the Heavenly Queen with invisible powers who may intercede and act on her own. Therefore, as the troparion says: "With faith crying out from the depths of soul, swiftly hear our prayers, O Virgin, for Quick to Hear you are named" (Akathist-S 2013, p. 14).

The icon symbolizes Mary's speedy help in response to one's heartfelt prayers, sorrows, and petitions through her divine intercession. She is the Heavenly Queen, the champion leader "defeating demonic regiments" (Akathist-S 2013, p. 12), "a lightning that lights our souls," and a "thunder" frightening forces that tempt and lure (Akathist-S 2013, p. 13). In this, she also carries active, even warrior-like, qualities, very much like Ancient Greek Athene or Artemis, both virgins full of determination (Andrews 2016). She is also the one who "guides our souls to the High Kingdom," "directing faithful on the path of salvation" (Akathist-S 2013, p. 26). In this aspect, Mary stands for an aspect of Sophia, the archetypal Feminine wisdom, and this is where Neumann places Mary. However, she is not only "quick to hear", but also "quick to punish" (again, very much like Athene or Artemis) as the story of Neilos shows. Thus, Neumann overlooks the fact that faithful might be equally aware of Mary's firm qualities in this icon. She thus incorporates aspects of the Terrible Mother, albeit in a constructive aspect for instance through taming arrogance. In the akathist she is referred to as the merciful "punisher" who targets "the ignorant with temporal chastisements" (Akathist-S 2013, p. 9). One feature of the icon does not exclude the other and the agency of Mary is, therefore, manyfold

here: embracing, warrior-like, and punishing. The Good Mother persists in the akathist to this icon as well in the vessel symbolism. Mary is glorified as the one who bore the One who “beheaded the ancient serpent”, “Inexhaustible vessel of life-giving water,” and “the dwelling-place of the Holy Ghost” (Akathist-S 2013, pp. 7, 17).



**Figure 2.** “She Who is Quick to Hear” (*Skoroposlushnitsa*), Krestovozdvizhenskiy church, Petrozavodsk, Russian Karelia (photo by authors).

### 3.3. Quenching Thirst

Another of the many agencies of Mary is captured in the Russian Marian icon “Inexhaustible Chalice,” which is now also known and venerated among Orthodox worldwide. In this icon, Mary is depicted “in the light of the divine glory” contemplating her son, “the Eternal God and Lord Jesus Christ, standing in the chalice” (Akathist-IC 2016). According to church tradition, “the Inexhaustible Chalice” (*Neupivaemaya Chasha*, Неупиваемая Чаша in Russian) was revealed in 19th century Russia to an alcoholic, retired soldier. A holy Elder, Saint Varlaam, appeared to him in a dream thrice, ordering him to go to a monastery in the city of Serpoukhov and have a prayer (молебен) served in front of the icon of the Mother of God “the Inexhaustible Chalice.” Weakened by his illness, the man crawled

to the monastery and told the monks about his dreams but none of them knew such an icon. Finally, one monk recalled an icon stored away in which a chalice was depicted. When the icon was found, the monks saw that on the back of the icon was written “The Inexhaustible Chalice.” After a prayer was served, the soldier was “healed from illness of the soul and of the body” (Akathist-IC 2016).

According to church tradition, many more were cured through the icon and news spread. Due to the turmoil and church prosecution in revolutionary Russia, the original icon was lost in 1919. After the Orthodox resurgence in post-Soviet Russia, copies of the icon were written in the Vysotskyi Men’s Monastery in 1993 and the Serpoukhovskii Women’s Monastery in 1995. The websites of the monasteries contain numerous and ongoing stories of the icon’s wonders, especially cures from alcohol and drug addictions. Many church-based centers, groups and clinics for alcohol and drug abusers (many of whom are men) take “The Inexhaustible Chalice” as their Protectress. “The Inexhaustible Chalice” has also been incorporated in Orthodoxy transnationally, and is venerated in the Greek Orthodox Church and some diasporic Orthodox churches in the US.

The Akathist hymn, devoted to “the Inexhaustible Chalice” is full of church poetry metaphorically pointing to the agentic vessel character of Mary as “the Inexhaustible Chalice” who “quenches our spiritual thirst,” “a cup of heavenly gifts who always remains full,” “vessel of holy water who dissolves our sorrow,” “the Fountain of Immortality,” “the Chalice of Life and Immortality,” “life-giving fountain of healing,” “heavenly cup of divine gifts,” “the river who carries miracles,” and “the sea into whom all passions sink” (Akathist-NC 2015, pp. 14–17). To the one who suffers from “the destructive ailment of drunkenness” (Akathist-NC 2015, p. 6), Mary offers another cup, the divine Eucharistic cup that “shows us the Lamb born of you, always eaten but never consumed” (Akathist-NC 2015, p. 15). Thus, Mary points to the mystery of the Divine Eucharist—the quintessence of the Divine Liturgy—when wine and bread are mystically transubstantiated to become the Body and the Blood of Christ (Merras 1992).

In this icon Mary suggests three archetypal symbols, agentic in their nature. First, Mary herself emerges as the vessel of transformation. Second, she points to another sacred vessel of transformation, the Eucharist cup of wine. Thirdly, this icon suggests the move between “two poles of one and the same axis” of the archetypal feminine, which “indicates the related phenomena that taken together constitute the transformative character” (Neumann 1955, p. 74). The negative pole of drunkenness is associated with alcohol overconsumption that evokes ecstasy, and eventually leads to personal disintegration (Neumann 1955, p. 73). The positive pole is the drunkenness of a poet (imaginative, abstracting) or mystic (imaginal, receiving), and is associated with temporal disintegration of the ego and ecstasy, leading to inspiration, vision, and wisdom, or Sophia. The phenomenon of reversal is intrinsic to the archetypal feminine. “The Inexhaustible Chalice” embodies this reversal movement, quenching spiritual thirst, and replacing the destructive cup of wine with the divine Eucharistic cup of wine.

### 3.4. Nourishing

Another symbolism of the archetypal feminine is embedded in the figure of nourishing Mother, manifested for instance in the Russia Marian icon, the “Multiplier of Wheat” (Sporitsel’nitsa khlebov, Спорительница хлебов), written by the hieromonk Daniil at the request of the Elder Ambrose (Амвросий) in 1890 (Alekseev 2016, p. 196). The Mother of God is depicted enthroned on the clouds, with her extended hands blessing the fields and sheaves of rye beneath her. A church Elder ordered this icon to be written in a year of famine in Central Russia and decreed the day of celebration on October 15, after harvesting. He also named the icon the “Multiplier of Wheat,” indicating that Mary is the “Nourisher” and “Multiplier” of “fields” and “breads,” the “blessed deliverance of people” from distress, poverty, famine, drought, and flooding (Akathist-Sk n.d., pp. 2, 7).

According to tradition, the icon revealed its wonder-qualities when grain grew abundantly in the Kaluga and Voronezh districts, where it was written, while famine persisted in the rest of Central Russia. The icon became very popular especially among peasantry, but soon after the death of the Elder



Ambrose, veneration of the icon was forbidden by the Synod. One of the reasons was its unorthodox iconography, in which Mary is depicted barefoot and without the traditional halo, but instead light shaped as the sun surrounds her head and shoulder area. However, the icon continued to be popular in vernacular use, and increased after the Soviet collapse, although contemporary depictions have incorporated traditional iconographic elements such as the halo, hidden feet, and the *mandorla* (circular glow around the figure of Mary) (Alekseev 2016, p. 197). Today, many Russian Orthodox keep a copy of this icon in their kitchens for their “daily bread.”

In the akathist, devoted to this icon, Mary is depicted as the one who may “grant our soils fertility” and “rescue [her] people from hunger” (Akathist-Sk n.d., pp. 2, 4). In this aspect, Mary is close to the “Lady of Plants” or the Mother Earth. For Neumann, the ancient Greek Goddess Demeter was the embodiment of the archetypal “Lady of Plants,” and he also places Mary next to this goddess at the pole of the Good Mother. Demeter, “she of grain” was at the heart of the Eleusian mysteries of birth, growth, fertility, death, and rebirth. Thus, the “Lady of Plants” is connected to nourishing and transformative aspects (like Demeter who taught humans agriculture). She is linked to the cyclical nature of the psyche (which, similar to vegetation, passes through different “seasons” in its transformation). In fact, some of the akathist poetics can be easily mistaken for the famous Homeric hymn to Demeter, the one “who sent forth fruit from the fertile fields” (line 471): “When the sun withers the earth . . . bestow a dew of your grace . . . fill the face of earth with joy” (Akathist-Sk n.d., p. 7). This connection was also noted by the Russian theologian Florensky (Florensky 1994, pp. 72–73) who rhetorically asked, “for, what is this Multiplier of loaves if not a vision of the Mother of God in the image, in the canonical form, of the Mother of Breads—Demeter?”

In the akathist, there are metaphorical references to Mary as the “Holy Trapeza” and the “Inexhaustible drink”; she is also the one who bore Christ “the bread of life,” and who spiritually “nourishes us with the bread of life;” she is the Queen of Heaven and Earth, who offers imperishable and eternal food, the mother of all (Akathist-Sk n.d., pp. 17, 10, 18, 8). Again, different types of roles are evident: she is both active as “Our Regal, Speedy Helper in days of hard trials,” “intercessor of orphans,” and in more sheltering and embracing qualities as the “garment of the naked” (Akathist-Sk n.d., pp. 3, 7).

### 3.5. Taming the Beasts

In contrast to the nourishing “Multiplier of Wheat”, the Greek “Virgin of Snakes” point to another agency of Mary. This type of agency is more connected with the Ancient Goddess Isis, the Great Mother herself—who could take a form of a cobra—or Demeter, whose symbol is not only grain, but also a snake. For Neumann, the ancient “Lady of Beasts” rules over the animals—outside of our “culture” (and, so, consciousness)—stands for drive, movement, and action (Neumann 1955, p. 275).

The “Virgin of Snakes” is found in the small Greek village of Markopoulo in south Kellafonia. According to oral tradition preserved by the villagers, and now maintained through Orthodox publishing and social media, a miracle occurs every year after the feast of the Transfiguration, celebrated on 6 August. Around the bell-tower of the chapel, built on the ruins of an old convent, small venomous snakes appear. These snakes crawl around the church and “venerate” the icons of the Theotokos, turning harmless so that people often take them in their hands (Sanidopolous 2009).

The snakes remain in and around the chapel until the feast of the Dormition, the “falling asleep” of Mary on 15 August. Then, they transform back into normal snakes, becoming hostile and dangerous, and disappear as mysteriously as they appear. When the snakes do not appear, the villagers see it as a sign of forthcoming disasters (as in 1940, when the island was occupied by the Nazi troops the year to come, or in 1953 when a series of devastating earthquakes took place). The story behind the mysterious appearance of the “holy snakes,” goes back to the beginning of the 18th century, when a convent stood at the same place. Pirates were about to attack the convent when the nuns ran to the bell tower and prayed passionately to the Virgin to rescue them. According to some version of this legend, nuns were turned into snakes and either slithered away safely or scared the pirates away. A Greek

interlocutor told us this version and saw the contemporary snakes as souls of those nuns. According to another version, the Virgin responded to the nuns to make snakes appear around the convent and scare the pirates away. As in the cases above, differences in the story only reveal it as living in people's practices and imaginations. Thousands of pilgrims from different countries visit this place before and on the Dormition to observe the miracle for themselves.

Symbolically, the Virgin of the Snakes points to the dual nature of the serpent, which in Western Christianity came to be seen only as a representation of evil. But earlier, and in the case of those venerating this icon, she embodies both fearsome aspects and wisdom to protect the nuns. The icon of Panaghia Feduosa in the chapel belongs to the Marian iconographic style "Tenderness" (Eleousa, Ἐλεούσα in Greek) (Cawthorne 2005, p. 52). Mary is depicted with the Christ child gently nestled against her forehead, grabbing her cloak with one hand and embracing her neck with another. There are many photos of exactly this icon with the two curled snakes venerating the icon on Orthodox websites (Figure 3). The two venomous snakes are entangled with the Tenderness icon, which more than any other Marian icon underlines the deeply intense relationship between the Mother and the Christ Child (Tradigo 2006, p. 177). Their love symbolizes the mystical union between Christ and Church, as well as the closeness in relationship between God and the human soul (Yazykova 1995). The agency of Mary here is not in ruling over the serpent, or attempting to kill it, but in taming the serpent through the deep mystery of divine love.



**Figure 3.** *Panaghia Feduosa* (Virgin of Snakes), Kellafonia, Greece.



#### 4. Discussion and Conclusions

In this paper, we set out to understand the widespread devotion to Mary through a variety of images amongst Eastern Orthodox Christians. We started by drawing attention to the poetics of Mary in Eastern Christianity, emphasizing the performativity and affect around Mary. We focused here on an analysis of five (out of many) Marian icons and their popular stories, along with three akathists, or devotional hymns connected to the icons. We approached this data in a post-Jungian framework of deep culture, which sees religious praxis as symbols leading to deeper meanings and significations. We showed how this approach of deep culture can be operationalized for research into five propositions that can reveal otherwise-obscure aspects of religiosity. A deep culture approach is related to a mystic, or esoteric, aspect of religiosity. Mary stands, so to speak, at the doorway of this mystic aspect to religiosity in Orthopraxis, leading faithful down into different aspects of themselves. In this sense, we showed that Mary has “agency” through her icons, their stories, and hymns.

The nature of this agency can be better appreciated when seen through the five-fold, symbolic framework of deep culture that links surface phenomena to significance-related depth. First, Mary’s agency is multivalent. It is clear from the five icons above that Mary does not merely “act” or not, but rather has different types of agency that all pull faithful participants “downward” into different types of sense-making. Even in just these five depictions, we find a number of overlapping yet distinct symbolic types. Further research is required to add to this list, possibly extending into dozens if not hundreds of nuances. For instance, a Russian icon portraying Mary as a warrior in chain mail and helmet evokes a martial agency different from those we have analyzed here. All these types are evident not just in the iconic styles and circulating stories, but also in how faithful engage with these icons. Moreover, there is not just a multiplicity of symbolic types of agencies but also at least two aspects to every type: literal and symbolic. For instance, Tsambika is seen as literally assisting barren women to conceive and symbolically assisting faithful to give birth to the spiritual, or Inexhaustible Chalice is seen as literally curing alcoholism and symbolically providing the cup of faith, etc. This duality is not an etic category: here we are presenting the explicit voice of Eastern Christians, who take Marian icons and related devotions both literally and symbolically. Furthermore, within each symbolic type there is a variation on Neumann’s axis of “Good” and “Terrible” (connoting harsh rather than evil). For Marian devotees, she is both quick to hear urgent prayers but also quick to punish: she responds at once both to what is wanted and to what is needed but not asked for. Likewise, the Virgin of Snakes is seen as extremely tender in her depiction in the icon, but the tradition also evokes taming of harsh beasts.

Second, Mary as symbol means that the Theotokos cannot be simply replaced by some other representation for the same functions of sense-making. The mysteries she points to—as Virgin and Mother—are pointed to by her and her alone. Swapping her for other symbols, whether logical expositions or other figures, will open up other mysteries but not the ones she leads into. What has historically happened in such attempts at replacement has been a suppression of feminine principles of spirituality (Baring and Cashford 1991), or a “strike against beauty itself” (Spretnak 2004, p. 208). As a complex symbol Mary, and only Mary, is intimately connected to what she symbolizes.

Third, Mary’s agency is archetypal in two senses. On one hand, the five icons are spread around the heartland of Eastern Christianity, and also evoke veneration amongst Orthodox diasporic populations around the world. This is also true of other icons, showing Mary’s universal appeal. On the other hand, the symbolic function played by a mother-(of)-god connects to a mystical aspect in almost all religious traditions. For instance, when presenting our results, we drew some parallels between Mary and ancient Greek goddesses. In doing this, we don’t mean to suggest that those, somehow more primal, figures are trapped into the singular and modern form of Mary. Rather, the connections point to archetypal commonalities. Mary was a literal person but was also much more. Over the years of her life and her tradition of worship, she accrued agency to enfold and enable people’s practice. While the Greeks (and other peoples) had a pantheon to host archetypal images, Mary herself became a multifaceted citadel of archetypes. Moreover, we have shown here that Mary has come to symbolize a movement of depth, or a mystical dimension to Orthodox praxis, which not all the ancient goddesses

did. Space restricts our further exploring this connection here, which would have to engage a fuller symbolic analysis of ancient goddesses. Mary also occupies an important and archetypally similar role in some other religious traditions, notably Roman Catholicism (e.g., Carroll 1986; Estés 2011; Spretnak 2004) and Islam (e.g., Murata 1992). We can also posit that Mary's archetypal symbolism of depth relates to traditions of feminine, esoteric mysticism that abound in almost all religious traditions (albeit more so in some). However, further empirical investigation is needed to understand to what extent Mary or other figures fulfil this role in various traditions, and what the global similarities and differences are.

Fourth, Mary's agency is of an interior nature rather than external, i.e., relating to people's depth sense-making rather than surface, evident action. In all five cases, Mary's agency embraces faithful in a transformative way. Mary's agency seems to center around elements of nourishing/caring, soothing, and responding. Above all, the nature of Mary's agency is mystical, that of transforming the private/inner world of the faithful, not (directly) the public/outer life in society. In this way, Mary's agency through icons applies to men as well as to women.

Finally, fifth, it is important that Mary is agentic *through* Marian icons. The icons are there for all to see, faithful members of the Orthodox church and any others. Yet, this manifestation needs some ritualistic, practical, and conceptual work to carry their signification beyond the literal person of Mary herself. Mary's agency seems to be esoteric, calling for appropriate, symbolic effort by faithful participants to transform themselves literally and symbolically. Since the icons venerated are approved by the Church in all cases, this means that Marian agency is not either lay or clerical/theological. Our analysis cuts across these lines to show how Mary opens a mystical pathway that is entirely personal and dependent on the individual, but always starts from and is rooted in the manifest icons that all can see and appreciate. In this way, Marian agency through icons is an excellent illustration of deep culture as a framework that allows analysts to connect the visible surface of religious phenomena to experiences of depth.

If Mary is, so to speak in post-Jungian terms, a "myth," (Warner 1983) then deep culture is a mythology within which her mystical role makes sense. We suggest that the deep culture framework can be used to explore similar "myths" of Mary in other traditions, as well as of other symbolic personages leading to mysticism in ancient and contemporary religious traditions.

**Author Contributions:** Both authors contributed equally to this paper. Writing—Original Draft, A.Q. and T.T.-Q.; Writing—Review & Editing, A.Q. and T.T.-Q.

**Funding:** Ali Qadir's research was funded by Academy of Finland grant number SA296045 and Tatiana Tiaynen-Qadir's research was partly funded by Academy of Finland grant number SA289004.

**Acknowledgments:** The authors gratefully acknowledge substantial input from, and discussions with Durre S. Ahmed.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

- Ahmed, Durre S. 2002. Women, psychology and religion. In *Gendering the Spirit: Women, Religion and the Post-Colonial Response*. Edited by Durre S. Ahmed. London: Zed Books, pp. 70–87.
- Ahmed, Durre S. 2010. Penetrations: A Psychocultural View of Modernity, Fundamentalisms and Islam. In *Islam and Europe: Crises and Challenges*. Edited by Jean-Yves Carlier and Marie Claire Foblet. Leuven: Leuven University Press, pp. 53–69.
- Akathist-IC. 2016. Akathist Hymn to Theotokos to the Inexhaustible Cup. Available online: <https://akathistreconstructed.wordpress.com/theotokos-cup/> (accessed on 3 June 2016).
- Akathist-NC. 2015. *Akafist Bozhjei Materi v Chest' Ikony Eyo 'Neupivaemaya Chasha'*. Moskva: Prikhod Khrama Sv. Dukha soshestviya na Lazarevskom kladbishche.
- Akathist-S. 2013. *Akafist Presvyatoi Bogoroditse v Chest' Ikony Eyo "Skoroposlushnitsa"*. Moskva: Blagovest.
- Akathist-Sk. n.d. *Akafist Presvyatoi Bogoroditse "Sporitselnitsa Khlebov"*. Nizhniy Novgorod: Nizhegorodskaya eparkhiya.
- Alekseev, S. 2016. *Chudotvornye Ikony Presvyatoi Bogoroditsy*. Moskva: Bibliopolis.

- Andrews, Valerie. 2016. Artemis and the new feminine psychology. *Jung Journal: Culture and Psyche* 10: 73–83. [CrossRef]
- Avishai, Orit. 2008. “Doing Religion” in a Secular World: Women in Conservative Religions and the Question of Agency. *Gender & Society* 22: 409–33. [CrossRef]
- Baring, Anne, and Jules Cashford. 1991. *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image*. London: Viking Arkana.
- Bracke, Sarah. 2008. Conjugating the Modern/Religious, Conceptualizing Female Religious Agency: Contours of a ‘Post-secular’ Conjuncture. *Theory, Culture & Society* 25: 51–67. [CrossRef]
- Bray, Carolyn H. 2016. Pele’s search for home: Images of the feminine Self. *Jung Journal: Culture and Psyche* 10: 10–23. [CrossRef]
- Carroll, Michael P. 1986. *The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Cawthorne, Nigel. 2005. *The Art of the Icon*, 2nd ed. Bounty Books: London.
- Corbin, Henry. 1997. *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi*, 3rd ed. Translated by R. Manheim. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Corbin, Henry. Translated by Ruth Horine. 1964. *Mundus Imaginalis, or the Imaginary and the Imaginal. Cahiers Internationaux de Symbolisme* 6: 3–26.
- Damrosch, Leopold, Jr. 1981. *Symbol and Truth in Blake’s Myth*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Eisler, Riane. 1987. *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*. New York: HarperOne.
- Estés, Clarissa Pinkola. 2011. *Untie the Strong Woman: Blessed Mother’s Immaculate Love for the Wild Soul*. Boulder: Sounds True.
- Florensky, Pavel Aleksandrovich. 1994. *Ikonostas*, 2nd ed. Moskva: Ikusstvo.
- Florensky, Pavel Aleksandrovich. 2002. Church ritual as a synthesis of the arts. In *Pavel Florensky: Beyond Vision—Essays on the Perception of Art (1922)*. Edited by Nicoletta Misler. London: Reaktion Books, pp. 95–111.
- Francis, Leslie J., John W. Fisher, and Jennie Annis. 2015. Spiritual well-being and psychological type: A study among visitors to a medieval cathedral in Wales. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 18: 675–92. [CrossRef]
- Francis, Leslie J., Ursula McKenna, and Abdullah Sahin. 2018. Facing the issues raised in Psalm 1 through thinking and feeling: Applying the SIFT approach to Biblical hermeneutics among Muslim educators. *Religions* 9: 323. [CrossRef]
- Hann, Chris, and Hermann Goltz. 2010. *Eastern Christians in Anthropological Perspective*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hierotheos, Georgios S. 1994. *Orthodox Psychotherapy: The Science of the Fathers*. Translated by E. Williams. Leviaia: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery.
- Hillman, James. 1975. *Re-Visioning Psychology*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Hillman, James. 1983. *Archetypal Psychology: A Brief Account*. Dallas: Spring Publications.
- Honkasalo, Marja-Liisa. 2015. If the Mother of God Does Not Listen: Women’s Contested Agency and the Lived Meaning of the Orthodox Religion in North Karelia. *The Journal of American Folklore* 128: 64–92. [CrossRef]
- Irigaray, Luce. 1985. *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Translated by Catherine Porter. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. 1968. *Man and His Symbols*. New York: Dell Laurel Editions.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. 2011. *Answer to Job*. Translated by Richard Francis Carrington Hull. Bollingen Series. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Keinänen, Marja-Liisa. 2010. *Perspectives on Women’s Everyday Religion*. Stockholm: Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis.
- Kogeraki, Kirill. n.d. *Kanon Molebnyi Presvyatoi Bogoroditsy Tsambiyskoi*. Archangelos: Izdanie monastyrya v chest’ Vsesvyatoi Bogoroditsy Tsambiyskoi Archangela.
- Kupari, Helena. 2016. *Life-Long Religion as Habitus: Religious Practice among Displaced Karelian Orthodox Women in Finland*. Leiden: Brill.
- Lossky, Vladimir. 1976. *The Mystical Theology of the Orthodox Church*. Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press.
- Mahmood, Saba. 2006. Feminist theory, agency, and the liberatory subject: Some reflections on the Islamic revival in Egypt. *Temenos: Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion* 42: 31–71.
- Merras, Merja. 1992. *Ortodoksinen Elämäntapa*. Heinävesi: Valamon Luostari.
- Molitvoslov. 2008. *Molitvoslov Pravoslavnoi Zhenzhchiny*. Moskva: Lepta Kniga, Yauza-Press, Eksmo.
- Morgan, David, Brent S. Plate, Jeremy Stolow, and Amy Whitehead. 2015. On the Agency of Religious Objects: A Conversation. Web Blog Post. Available online: <http://materialreligions.blogspot.gr/2015/10/on-agency-of-religious-objects.html> (accessed on 24 July 2017).

- Munteanu, Daniel. 2013. An iconic theology of beauty: Orthodox aesthetics of salvation. *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 3: 27–61.
- Murata, Sachiko. 1992. *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Neumann, Erich. 1955. *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*. Bollingen Series. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Palamas, Grigorii. 1993. *Besedy (Omilii) Svyatitelja Grigorija Palamy*. Translated by Arhim Amvrosii Pogodin. Moskva: Palomnik, vol. 3.
- Palmer, Michael. 2013. *Freud and Jung on Religion*. London: Routledge.
- Qadir, Ali. 2018. Doors to the Imaginal: Implications of Sunni Islam's Persecution of the Ahmadi "Heresy". *Religions* 9: 91–107. [CrossRef]
- Qadir, Ali, and Tatiana Tiaynen-Qadir. 2016. Toward an imaginal dialogue: Archetypal symbols between Orthodox Christianity and Islam. *Approaching Religion* 6: 81–95. [CrossRef]
- Sanidopoulos, John. 2009. The Holy Snakes of the Virgin Mary in Kellafonia. Available online: <http://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2009/08/holy-snakes-of-virgin-examining.html> (accessed on 27 December 2017).
- Schmemmann, Alexander. 1991. *Celebration of Faith: The Virgin Mary*. New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, vol. 3.
- Seppälä, Serafim. 2010. *Elämän Aiti: Neitsyt Maria Varhaiskristillisessä Teologiassa*. Helsinki: Maahenki.
- Seppälä, Serafim. 2013. *Naiseus: Varhaiskristillisiä ja Juutalaisia näkökulmia*. Helsinki: Kirjapaja.
- Sperber, Dan. 1975. *Rethinking Symbolism*. Translated by Alice L. Morton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Spretnak, Charlene. 2004. *Missing Mary: The Queen of Heaven and Her Re-Emergence in the Modern Church*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tiaynen-Qadir, Tatiana. 2016. Orthodox icons of Mary generating transnational space between Finland and Russia. *Lähde: Historiallinen Aikakauskirja*, 138–71.
- Tradigo, Alfredo. 2006. *Icons and Saints of the Eastern Orthodox Church: A Guide to Imagery*. Translated by Stephen Sartarelli. Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum.
- Unterrainer, Human-Friedrich, Andrew J. Lewis, and Andreas Fink. 2014. Religious/Spiritual Well-Being, Personality and Mental Health: A Review of Results and Conceptual Issues. *Journal of Religion and Health* 53: 382–92. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Von Franz, Marie-Louise. 1997. *Archetypal Dimensions of the Psyche*. Boston: Shambhala Publications.
- Vuola, Elina. 2010. *Jumalainen Nainen: Neitsyt Mariaa Etsimässä*. Helsinki: Helsingissä Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otava.
- Warner, Marina. 1983. *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of Virgin Mary*, 2nd ed. New York: Vintage Books.
- Warnock, Mary. 1976. *Imagination*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Weaver, Dorothy C. 2011. Shifting agency: Male clergy, female believers, and the role of icons. *Material Religion* 7: 394–419. [CrossRef]
- Yazykova, I. K. 1995. *Bogoslovie Ikony*. Moskva: Obschedostypnyi Pravoslavnyi Universitet.



© 2018 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).